EPA proposes Columbia Falls Aluminum Plant site for Superfund designation (Montana)

Proposed addition to the National Priorities List is subject to a 60-day public comment period

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(Denver, Colo. – March 26, 2015) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today proposed adding the Anaconda Aluminum Company's Columbia Falls Reduction Plant (also known as XX), near Columbia Falls, Mont., to the National Priorities List (NPL) making it eligible for additional study and cleanup resources under EPA's Superfund program. The proposed listing will be subject to a ~~A~~ 60-day public review and comment period ~~about the proposed listing begins on .....~~beginning on March XX. Superfund is the federal program that investigates and cleans up the country's the most complex, uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous waste sites to protect public health and the environment.

The proposed Superfund site, located approximately ~~2~~ two miles north-east of Columbia Falls, ~~has~~ operated as a primary aluminum reduction facility between 1955 and 2009. Contaminants detected at the site ~~in the groundwater at the site~~ include cyanide, fluoride and metals, ~~including~~ such as arsenic, chromium, lead, and selenium. These contaminants are present in soils, surface ponds, and groundwater at the site and pose a risk to nearby wells and the Flathead River. EPA and the State of Montana have determined that a comprehensive investigation of the site is necessary to inform effective cleanup actions to address these risks. ~~All were found to be above EPA's Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) for drinking water.~~

~~Domestic wells near the facility have been sampled, and two wells have had detections of cyanide, with concentrations below EPA's MCL and the State of Montana's Numeric Water Quality Standard.~~

~~The Flathead River, which flows adjacent to the aluminum plant, had was found to have above background concentrations of cyanide and manganese above backgrounds levels, and it is a known fishery, which includes the federally designated threatened bull trout.~~

"EPA will continue to work closely with the local community, our state counterparts, and representatives from the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company to ensure a comprehensive investigation of the site is completed," said Martin Hestmark, EPA's assistant regional administrator for Superfund programs in Denver. "These efforts will identify cleanup actions needed to address human health and environmental concerns and will help local interests as they look for opportunities to reuse this significant property along the Flathead River."
~~Quote," said Shaun McGrath/Martin Hestmark, Title, "Quote"~~

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~~Prior to the mid-1980s, spent pot lining material, a byproduct of the aluminum production process, was disposed in multiple landfills on site. Spent pot lining material is known to contain elevated concentrations of cyanide, which was found in groundwater down gradient of the landfill area. Other areas in need of additional investigation include landfills containing fluoride rich sludge and percolation ponds that received various wastewater streams.~~

Commented [PC1]: I think this may be too much detail.

The City of Columbia Falls (maybe others, I need to dig a bit) have ~~expressed~~ supported ~~that~~ the addition of the Columbia Falls Aluminum site ~~be placed on~~ to the NPL, and the State of Montana has concurred. EPA will carefully evaluate all public comments received on the proposed listing before making a final decision.

The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), the law establishing the Superfund program, requires EPA to update the NPL at least annually and to clean up hazardous waste sites to protect human health and the environment, with the goal of returning them to productive use. A site's listing neither imposes a financial obligation on EPA nor assigns liability to any party. ~~However, U~~updates to the NPL do, however, provide ~~policymakers with a list of high-priority sites, serving to identify the size and nature of the nation's cleanup challenges.~~

The Superfund program has provided important benefits for people and the environment since Congress established the program in 1980. Those benefits are both direct and indirect, and include reduction of threats to human health and ecological systems in the vicinity of Superfund sites, improvement of the economic conditions and quality of life in communities affected by hazardous waste sites, prevention of future releases of hazardous substances, and advances in science and technology.

For more information, including how to comment on the proposed listing, visit:
http://www2.epa.gov/region8/columbia-falls-aluminum-reduction-plant